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Libertarian Communism, the Only Real Communism

Daniel Guérin

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It is time to outline a synthesis of all my work and attempt to sketch a program, at the risk of seeing myself accused of engaging in "metapolitics."

It would be futile to engage in a sort of replastering of an edifice of cracked and worm-eaten socialist doctrines, to struggle to patch together some of the surviving solid fragments of traditional Marxism and anarchism, to indulge in Marxist or Bakuninist scholarship, to seek to trace, merely on paper, tortuous connections.

If in this book we have often turned to the past it was of course not, as the reader will have understood, to dwell on it self-indulgently. To learn from it, to draw from it, yes, for previous experience is rich in teachings, but with an eye to the future.

The libertarian communism of our time, which blossomed in the French May '68, goes far beyond communism and anarchism.

Calling oneself a libertarian communist today does not mean looking backwards, but rather drafting a sketch of the future.

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Chapter from *For a Libertarian Communism*
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Libertarian communists are not exegetes, they are militants. They understand that it is incumbent upon them to change the future, no more, no less. History has backed them against the wall. The hour of the socialist revolution has rung everywhere. Like the moon landing, it has entered the realm of the immediate and the possible. The precise definition of the forms of a socialist society no longer belong to the realm of utopia. The only people lacking in realism are those who close their eyes to these truths.

What will be the guiding lines that we are going to follow to accomplish the Revolution which, as Gracchus Babeuf said, will be the final one?

To start with, before going into action, libertarian communists assess the exact nature of objective conditions; they attempt to evaluate accurately the balance of power in every situation. Here the method elaborated by Karl Marx and which has not aged, namely historical and dialectical materialism, remains the surest of compasses, an inexhaustible mine of models and guideposts. On condition, however, that it be treated as Marx did himself, that is, without doctrinal rigidity, and that it avoid mechanistic inflexibility; on condition that, sheltering beneath its wing, one does not eternally invent poor pretexts and pseudo-objective reasons to excuse oneself from pushing things to the limit, to sow confusion, to miss the revolutionary opportunity every time it presents itself.

Libertarian communism is a communism that rejects determinism and fatalism, which gives space to individual will, intuition, imagination, the rapidity of reflexes, the profound instinct of the large masses, who are wiser at moments of crisis than the reasonings of the “elite,” who believe in the element of surprise and provocation, in the value of audacity, who do not allow themselves to be encumbered and paralyzed by a weighty, supposedly “scientific” ideological apparatus, who do not prevaricate or bluff, who avoid both adventurism and fear of the unknown.

Libertarian communists have learned from experience how to set about things: they hold in contempt the impotent shambles of disorganization as much as the bureaucratic ball and chain of over-organization.

Libertarian communists, faithful on this point to both Marx and Bakunin, reject the fetishism of the single, monolithic, and totalitarian party, just as they avoid the traps of a fraudulent and demobilizing electoralism.

Libertarian communists are, in their essence, internationalists. They consider the global struggles of the exploited as a whole. But they nonetheless take into account the specificity and the original forms of socialism in each country. They only conceive internationalism to be proletarian if it is inspired from the bottom up, on a level of complete equality, without any form of subordination to a “big brother” who thinks himself stronger and cleverer.

Libertarian communists never sacrifice the revolutionary struggle to the diplomatic imperatives of the so-called socialist empires and, like Che Guevara, do not hesitate to send them both packing if their aberrant fratricidal quarrels cause mortal harm to the cause of universal socialism.

When the moment of the revolutionary test of strength arrives, libertarian communists will attack at both the center and the periphery, in the political and administrative fields as well as the economic. On the one hand, they will deal mercilessly, with all their might, and if necessary by means of armed struggle, with the bourgeois state and the entire complex machinery of power, be it at the level of the capital, the regions, the departments, or the municipalities; they will never make the mistake, on the pretext of “apoliticism,” of neglecting, underestimating, or abstaining from dismantling the citadels, the political centers, from which the enemy’s resistance is directed. But at the same time, combining the economic and political struggles, they will at their workplaces take control of all posts held by the bosses and wrest the means of production from those

who monopolize them, in order to hand them over to their real, rightful owners: the self-managing workers and technicians.

Once that revolution is victoriously and completely accomplished, libertarian communists do not smash the state in order to reestablish it in another even more oppressive form through the colossal expansion of its capacities. Rather, they want the transmission of all power to a confederation of federations, that is, to a confederation of communes, themselves federated in regions, a confederation of revolutionary workers' unions preexisting the revolution or, failing that, the confederation of workers' councils born of the revolution, which does not exclude the eventuality of a merger of the latter two. Elected for a short mandate and not eligible for reelection, the delegates to these various bodies are controllable and revocable at all times.

Libertarian communists shun any particularist atomization into small units, communes, and workers' councils, and aspire to a federalist coordination, one which is both close-knit and freely consented to. Rejecting bureaucratic and authoritarian planning, they believe in the need for coherent and democratic planning, inspired from the bottom up.

Because they are of their time, libertarian communists want to wrest the media, automation, and computers from the malevolent monopolists and place them at the service of liberation.

Hardened authoritarians and sceptics maintain that the imperatives of contemporary technology are incompatible with a libertarian communist society. On the contrary, the libertarian communists intend to unleash a new technological revolution, this time oriented towards both higher productivity and a shorter work day, towards decentralization, decongestion, de-bureaucratization, dis-alienation, and a return to nature. They condemn the degrading mentality of the so-called consumer society while preparing to raise consumption to its highest level ever.

Libertarian communists carry out this gigantic overturning at the price of the least possible disorder, neither too slowly

nor too soon. They know that a wave of the magic wand cannot instantly effect the most profound social transformation of all time. They do not lose sight of the fact that with the hominid distorted by millennia of oppression, obscurantism, and egoism, time will be needed to form a socialist man or socialist woman. They agree to transitions while refusing to see them perpetuated. And so it is that while assigning as the ultimate goal, to be reached by stages, the withering away of competition, the free provision of public and social services, the disappearance of money, and the distribution of abundance according to the needs of each; that while aiming at association within self-management of agriculturalists and artisans, at the cooperative reorganization of commerce, it is not their plan to abolish overnight competition and the laws of the marketplace, remuneration according to labor accomplished, small farming, and artisanal and commercial property.

They do not think superfluous the temporary assistance of active minorities who are more educated and conscious, whatever name they might give themselves, minorities whose contribution is unavoidable in bringing the rearguard to full socialist maturity, but who will not stay on stage one day longer than necessary and will merge as quickly as possible into the egalitarian association of producers.

The libertarian communists do not offer us yet another "groupuscule." For them the guiding lines that we have just laid out coincide with the basic class instinct of the working class.

In my opinion—and long, arduous, and painful experience has demonstrated this—apart from libertarian communism there is no real communism.